

Repent and Believe – Mark 1:15

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[What follows is the transcript of a sermon. It was initially intended to be heard, not read, so the tone is more conversational than academic. It has only been loosely edited, so forgive any grammatical, syntactical, or spelling errors. If you have questions, don't hesitate to get in touch with Pastor Derek at Derek.berry1990@gmail.com.]

Take your copy of God's Word and meet me in Mark 1:14-15....

¹⁴Now after John was arrested, Jesus came into Galilee, proclaiming the gospel of God, ¹⁵and saying, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel."

How do you feel when you're given good advice, as opposed to when you're given good news? In other words, how do you respond to good news? Now contrast that with how you react to some advice. There are many exceptions to this rule, so I'm generally speaking here. Let's say I give you some advice on how to become financially wealthy. When you hear it, you become inspired; however, do you feel like a victory has just been won for you? Now imagine I inform you that you've just won a large amount of money. That doesn't exclude a response so that you may receive what has been won for you; however, hearing this news is liberating. And this is the difference between the message of any other religion, contrasted with that of the Christian gospel. The common theme in any religion boils down to advice on how to live to obtain the right standing with God. Perhaps you've once been a part of works-based religion, or maybe that's your current belief. Do you feel your burdens have fallen off? Do you feel like something has been done for you and, therefore, you're no longer a slave? I'm sure you would say you don't feel this way if you're honest. That's because this advice weighs you down; it's a heavy yoke. However, the gospel is an announcement of something that has happened in history, something that's been done for you that changes your status forever; thus, it makes Christianity different from every other religion or philosophy. But the question is, how do you receive this gift? What is the proper response to the truth that God's kingdom has come and the work of the cross is accomplished? The Lord Jesus tells us in verse 15: Repentance and faith (belief). So, this morning, we'll consider these two concepts. What does it mean to repent? And what does it mean to believe? Let's reread verse 5.

"The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel."

Let's start with a quick summary of what we've studied thus far. The first eight verses of Mark introduce us to the identity of Jesus. We then considered the baptism and temptation of Jesus in verses nine through thirteen. Last week we discussed the kingdom of God and how it relates to the gospel. So, let's dive into our study for this morning.

Again, Jesus is preaching that the King is here to inaugurate the kingdom that's been prophesied for all these years. The end time rule and reign of God over his people by his anointed Son and servant has begun. Now how do you find yourself in this kingdom? Repent and believe in this

good news. Remember, the term “gospel” would've had a more pregnant meaning for Mark and his readers than Jesus’ original audience. Mark and his audience are on this side of the cross; therefore, the gospel refers explicitly to the cross. The message is that sinners can be reconciled back to God based on the finished work of the Lord Jesus.

Although the emphasis on the gospel has changed due to the cross, the response remains the same, repentance and belief. We know this based on the preaching in the book of Acts. We see this combination of terms tethered to the preaching of the gospel through the book. Because they’re two sides of the same coin. You can’t genuinely have one without the other. Here are some examples,

¹⁷If then God gave the same gift to them as he gave to us when we believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I that I could stand in God's way? ” ¹⁸When they heard these things they fell silent. And they glorified God, saying, “Then to the Gentiles also God has granted repentance that leads to life.” -Acts 11:17-18

We’ll come back to this text later.

²⁰how I did not shrink from declaring to you anything that was profitable, and teaching you in public and from house to house, ²¹testifying both to Jews and to Greeks of repentance toward God and of faith in our Lord Jesus Christ. -Acts 20:20-21

And even when not mentioned together, the presence of one of these terms assumes the accompaniment of the other. Here are two examples to prove this point.

³⁸And Peter said to them, “Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. -Acts 2:38

Yet, to repent and be baptized is inconceivable apart from believing. So, it’s assumed in the text. Likewise:

³¹And they said, “Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household.” -Acts 16:31

This, too, is inconceivable apart from repentance. So, as we answer how Jesus’ audience was commanded to respond to the gospel through repentance and faith, we’ll answer how we are called to respond to the message of the cross through repentance and faith.

Let’s start with repentance. We’ll begin by considering what repentance is NOT before we examine a biblical definition.

1. Repentance is not an emotional experience.

I want to quote the prince of preachers here. Charles Spurgeon remarks on those who bear the signs of false repentance.

There are many men who when they hear a faithful gospel sermon, are exceedingly stirred and moved by it. By a certain power which accompanies the Word, God testifies that it is his own Word, and he causes those who hear it involuntarily to tremble. I have seen some men, while the truths of Scripture have been sounded from this pulpit, whose knees have knocked together, whose eyes have flowed with tears as if they had been fountains of water. -Charles Spurgeon

We're often tempted to mistake human expressions of emotion for genuine repentance. However, crying during the Passion of Christ is not a fruit of the Spirit. We're watching a man get beaten to a bloody pulp, which will lead to some emotional response. But for many, it's no different from crying when Mufasa in Lion King died, or Titanic, or if you were like me when Iron Man and Logan died. So, it can be less about Jesus and his sacrifice and more about the emotional scene on the screen. If you notice, the Bible doesn't go to great lengths to describe the horrific details of the crucifixion. One of the reasons, I'm sure, is that the original audience would have been familiar with the crucifixion process, but also because that's not the most critical component of what is taking place at the cross. Countless individuals throughout church history have been martyred in a similarly horrific fashion. What's unique about this death is that Jesus is facing the full wrath of his Father on behalf of all who will believe. You can watch the Passion of Christ, weep, and completely miss this fact. Therefore, this response doesn't equal repentance.

So emotionally charged responses can be deceptive. I remember giving the gospel to a classmate in high school. She wept for almost an hour straight while hearing the gospel. However, the next day she returned to her life as if nothing had happened. A repentance that doesn't last is no repentance at all.

2. Repentance is not regretting the consequences of sin.

Allow me to start once again by quoting Spurgeon.

There are repentances which are not signs of life, except of natural life, because they are only effected by the power of the conscience and the voice of nature speaking in men.

Every night is the same thing. My wife or I will tuck the girls to bed and instruct them to sleep. Neriah usually falls asleep quickly, as she's our early morning bird. Gema, on the other hand, takes a while to go to sleep. Not only does she take a long time to go to sleep, but she makes a lot of noise while awake. And like clockwork, I'll walk into the room, and she'll utter the word "sorry." And then three minutes later, she's back at it. True contrition hasn't taken place in her heart, but she doesn't like the consequences of her actions.

This is another counterfeit form of repentance. Judas and Peter are two great examples of authentic and counterfeit repentance. Both disciples deny the Lord Jesus in their own way. Peter experiences true repentance, which leads to godliness. Judas, however, felt terrible about what he did.

³ *Then when Judas, his betrayer, saw that Jesus^o was condemned, he changed his mind and brought back the thirty pieces of silver to the chief priests and the elders, ⁴ saying, "I have sinned*

by betraying innocent blood.” They said, “What is that to us? See to it yourself.”⁵ And throwing down the pieces of silver into the temple, he departed, and he went and hanged himself. - Matthew 27:3-5

So, he genuinely felt bad, but it was only worldly sorrow which didn't lead to life. His repentance only led to more sin, taking his own life. Paul the Apostle makes this distinction when writing to the church at Corinth.

⁹As it is, I rejoice, not because you were grieved, but because you were grieved into repenting. For you felt a godly grief, so that you suffered no loss through us.¹⁰ For godly grief produces a repentance that leads to salvation without regret, whereas worldly grief produces death. ¹¹For see what earnestness this godly grief has produced in you, but also what eagerness to clear yourselves, what indignation, what fear, what longing, what zeal, what punishment! At every point you have proved yourselves innocent in the matter. -2 Corinthians 7:9-11

So, there is a type of regret, a type of grief, and a type of sorrow that doesn't lead anywhere and is counterfeit repentance.

3. Repentance is not an outward turning from evil works. (Not behavior change)

Now this one may surprise you. I'm sure you've heard repentance is a turning away from sins. And it certainly is, but that can easily be misunderstood. If you think repentance is changing your behavior, removing corruption, and leading a holier life, then you have works-based salvation. Consequently, you can no longer affirm justification by faith alone. This is why some deny that repentance is necessary for salvation. But that's not an option, as the Scripture clarifies that apart from repentance, there can be no entry into the kingdom and no eternal life. Remember this concept, as we'll revisit it when we define repentance.

4. Repentance is not perfection.

This last one isn't a counterfeit but rather a clarification. Before we examine a biblical definition of repentance, understand that the Bible doesn't teach that repentance equates to a sinless life. The Apostle Peter, whom Jesus gave the keys of the kingdom to in Matthew 18, who preached the first Christian sermon in Acts 2, in which three thousand responded, who preached to the gentiles that they received life, the one Jesus loved and commissioned, was not perfect after repenting unto salvation.

¹¹But when Cephas came to Antioch, I opposed him to his face, because he stood condemned. - Galatians 2:11

So thankfully, repentance is not perfection. And not even our repentance is ever entirely perfect. Enough of what repentance is not; let's look at what repentance is. We'll consider three elements.

1. Repentance includes genuine sorrow over sin.

We see this modeled in the Old Testament prophets' calls to the nation of Israel to repent. ¹² *“Yet even now,” declares the Lord, “return to me with all your heart, with fasting, with weeping, and with mourning; ¹³ and rend your hearts and not your garments.” Return to the Lord your God, for he is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love; and he relents over disaster. -Joel 2:12-13*

We also see this idea in the beatitudes, which build on one another.

³ *“Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. ⁴ “Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted. -Matthew 5:3-4*

Once individuals realize their fallen state, they mourn and grieve over their sin and rebellion against a holy and righteous God. There's a difference when you drive down the road, see an accident, and don't know anyone involved. You may feel a bit of grief, but it's mixed with indifference. However, if you were to discover that someone you loved was in the accident, it all of a sudden becomes personal. We live our lives indifferent toward God and his laws. It's not until he begins a work that we mourn the offense of our sin toward a righteous God.

2. Repentance is a change of mind, and a complete reorientation of the heart regarding God and sin.

That's what the New Testament Greek word means. It's a change of heart. Where you initially cherished sin and devalued God, repentance means you no longer have the same heart posture towards evil, and you now view God and his son as precious. So, in the words of John Piper, “repentance is a reversal of what we treasure.” It happens within. However, it does lead to a behavioral change. And that gets to our third and final point on repentance.

3. Authentic repentance will result in a turning away from sin.

Remember, earlier, we said repentance is not a behavior change. And this is an important distinction because if repentance is necessary for salvation, and we define repentance as an outward behavioral change, we've jettisoned justification by faith alone and have adopted works-based salvation. But in like manner, we must acknowledge that transformation is not a result of repentance, lest we're left with a Christianity that will mass-produce false converts. More on that in a bit.

Life transformation, or turning away from sin, is a fruit of repentance. This John the Baptist says what he does in Luke 3:8:

⁸ *Bear fruits in keeping with repentance. -Luke 3:8*

Paul says something similar:

²⁰ *but declared first to those in Damascus, then in Jerusalem and throughout all the region of Judea, and also to the Gentiles, that they should repent and turn to God, performing deeds in keeping with their repentance. -Acts 26:20*

To quote Piper again, “This turning is the heart’s redirection from prizing this world to prizing God.” This is repentance, and its effect is new behavior called “deeds in keeping with repentance.” So, the deeds are not the repentance; they are the fruit. But if the deeds are not present in the life of one who claims to be a follower of Christ, then they haven’t genuinely repented unto life. Let’s look back at John the Baptist’s call for the people to bear fruit in keeping with repentance. He provides them examples:

¹⁰ And the crowds asked him, “What then shall we do?” ¹¹ And he answered them, “Whoever has two tunics is to share with him who has none, and whoever has food is to do likewise.” ¹² Tax collectors also came to be baptized and said to him, “Teacher, what shall we do?” ¹³ And he said to them, “Collect no more than you are authorized to do.” ¹⁴ Soldiers also asked him, “And we, what shall we do?” And he said to them, “Do not extort money from anyone by threats or by false accusation, and be content with your wages.” -Luke 3:10-14

In other words, turn from a life of sin because repentance gives rise to behavior change. We see another example with Simon the Magician.

²⁰ But Peter said to him, “May your silver perish with you, because you thought you could obtain the gift of God with money! ²¹ You have neither part nor lot in this matter, for your heart is not right before God. ²² Repent, therefore, of this wickedness of yours, and pray to the Lord that, if possible, the intent of your heart may be forgiven you. -Acts 8:20-22

So, Peter identifies that Simon’s problem is located in his heart. And then he prescribes repentance as the answer. So, it’s the heart that changes with repentance. It changes fundamentally towards God. He needed a new orientation of his heart towards the Lord because it was crooked.

Therefore beloved, reject this easy believism form of Christianity that’s leading many so people to hell. The form that says as long as you’ve prayed this prayer and received this salvific flu shot, then you’re good to go. Matthew 7 makes evident that there will be many who believed themselves to be Christ’s followers, yet they had not repented. They seemed to believe, yet there was no repentance.

²² On that day many will say to me, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?’ ²³ And then will I declare to them, ‘I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness.’ -Matthew 7:22-23

Again, there’s no mystery that the Apostles preached repentance.

¹⁸ to open their eyes, so that they may turn from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in me.’ -Acts 26:18

⁹ For they themselves report concerning us the kind of reception we had among you, and how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God... -1 Thessalonians 1:9

So, the evidence that one has repented unto salvation is that one will lead a life of repentance. Dietrich Bonhoeffer put it well when he said, “*When Christ calls a man, he bids him come and die.*” In the words of Jesus,

²³ And he said to all, “If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me. -Luke 9:23

Now that we’ve considered repentance, let’s flip the coin and consider belief or faith. Again, let’s start with what salvific faith is NOT before we look at what it is. Only one point for each this time.

1. Faith is not merely mental assent.

In other words, it doesn’t merely recognize a set of facts. Once again, consider Simon the magician.

¹³ Even Simon himself believed, and after being baptized he continued with Philip. And seeing signs and great miracles¹⁴ performed, he was amazed. -Acts 8:13

²⁰ But Peter said to him, “May your silver perish with you, because you thought you could obtain the gift of God with money! ²¹ You have neither part nor lot in this matter, for your heart is not right before God.²² Repent, therefore, of this wickedness of yours, and pray to the Lord that, if possible, the intent of your heart may be forgiven you. ²³ For I see that you are in the gall¹⁵ of bitterness and in the bond of iniquity.” -Acts 8:20-23

So, Simon didn’t have the right kind of belief. It was merely an acknowledgment of facts instead of inward change from God. Consider these two texts as well,

²³ Now when he was in Jerusalem at the Passover Feast, many believed in his name when they saw the signs that he was doing. ²⁴ But Jesus on his part did not entrust himself to them, because he knew all people... -John 2:23-24

¹⁹ You believe that God is one; you do well. Even the demons believe—and shudder! ²⁰ Do you want to be shown, you foolish person, that faith apart from works is useless? -James 2:19-20

And consider Matthew 7, which we read earlier. So, what is faith?

1. Faith is trust and reliance on Jesus Christ and his finished work.

Faith declares, God, I fully and affectionally believe, trust, and rely on the finished work of Jesus to make me right with you. It’s clutching onto the savior for dear life. That’s faith! A miracle above all else. This leads to the final point we’ll consider before I leave you with three practical implications to take away from this sermon.

What you should be asking is, how do we change who we are at our core? How can such deep work happen? Can we just decide to repent and believe all on our own one day? Well, based on how the Scriptures describe these two components, no! We don't have the facilities within us. Repentance and faith happen within us, but they don't originate from us. The Bible says that both are gifts that God must grant. Let's take a look at a few of these texts.

¹⁸ When they heard these things they fell silent. And they glorified God, saying, "Then to the Gentiles also God has granted repentance that leads to life." -Acts 11:18

²⁴ And the Lord's servant must not be quarrelsome but kind to everyone, able to teach, patiently enduring evil, ²⁵ correcting his opponents with gentleness. God may perhaps grant them repentance leading to a knowledge of the truth... -2 Timothy 2:24-25

⁸ For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God. -Ephesians 2:8

⁴⁸ And when the Gentiles heard this, they began rejoicing and glorifying the word of the Lord, and as many as were appointed to eternal life believed. -Acts 13:48

²⁵ I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you shall be clean from all your uncleannesses, and from all your idols I will cleanse you. ²⁶ And I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. ²⁷ And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules. -Ezekiel 36:25-27

So repentance and faith are both a command and a gift from God, and he grants them to whom he pleases. It's like when you want your child to get into the practice of giving in the church. So your instruction is to provide money into the offering plate. But they're unemployed, so you have to provide them with the money to place into the offering plate. Thus it's both a command, as well as a gift. And praise God for these gifts that lead to eternal life.

I'll close with three quick practical implications of this text on your life.

1. Have you repented and believed in the gospel of the Lord Jesus?
2. Are you calling others to respond to the gospel as the apostles did? (Luke 24:46-47) *⁴⁶ and said to them, "Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead, ⁴⁷ and that repentance for the forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem.*
3. Can you distinguish false and true repentance in others for the sake of utilizing the keys of the kingdom?

Let's pray.